

Department of Public Health
and Human Services

Section:
APPLICATION PROCESSING

FAMILIES ACHIEVING
INDEPENDENCE IN MONTANA

Subject:
General Complaint Procedure

Supersedes: Family Assistance manual section FA 250-2

References: None

GENERAL RULE: Federal law requires states to maintain a system for handling general program complaints filed by participants, potential participants, or other concerned individuals or groups. This shall not include complaints alleging discrimination based on the protected classes outlined under Civil Rights law, or complaints that can be pursued through the fair hearing process.

DEFINITION: **General Program Complaint:** Any complaint regarding such areas as processing standards, or service to participants and potential participants.

Examples of complaints:

- Consistently late benefit delivery
- Late processing of applications
- Staff rudeness or misunderstandings
- Concern about office hours or access
- Information not being shared or telephone calls not being returned

RESPONSIBILITIES: **Department:** The department will maintain records for three years of complaints received and their disposition, and will follow up to see that the complaints are responded to and resolved. The records will be reviewed at least annually to assess whether patterns of problems may be present in local offices, project areas or throughout the state and to identify causes of those problems.

When warranted, the department may have to take corrective action in the resolution of certain complaints.

In addition the department will make information on the complaint system available to participants, potential participants and other interested persons. This can be done with written materials, posters, or other appropriate means.

Directors and Supervisors: Directors and Supervisors are responsible for notifying participants and the public of their right to file general program complaints. They will maintain a central complaint log that contains at least the minimum information listed below, and will follow up on

complaints to see that they are responded to and resolved. Complaints need to be reviewed periodically to see whether patterns of problems may be present and to identify possible causes of the problems. They are responsible to ensure that staff is trained on the proper processing of complaints.

Employees: Employees are responsible to record complaints received and see that they are logged, responded to and resolved.

COMPLAINT LOGS: County offices may use their own discretion in developing the forms for recording complaints and in developing their logs. This does not have to be consistent across the state. However, stacks of sticky notes or little scraps of paper are not adequate to constitute a complaint log. Complaint logs need to contain the following minimum information:

- Name, address and phone number or other means of contacting the complainant.
- Name and location of the organization, office, or person the complaint is against.
- The date(s) on which the action causing the complaint occurred.
- The reason for the complaint.
- The action taken and the resolution or disposition of the complaint.

MONITORING: Complaint logs will be routinely reviewed during the Management Evaluation Process and when FIA reviews take place in county offices. Logs will be evaluated for completion, complaint resolution and will be analyzed for patterns of problems and potential causes and solutions. Compliance with the General Program Complaint procedure will be noted in the report generated following all Management Evaluations and will also be noted during annual FIA reviews.

CwC/KJ/NC/LB/KQ